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Extension Extra

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Just for Kids:

West Nile Virus

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You want to go out and play. But you are scared. You have heard about mosquitoes and West Nile Virus. There are mosquitoes around your yard and you don't want to get bit. You decide to stay inside.

GUESS WHAT?!!! You can still go outside and play if you follow some simple rules. So go ahead!! **Enjoy the summer!**

By understanding the virus, we are able to protect ourselves from it. This information on the West Nile Virus will help you protect yourself.

What is West Nile Virus?

It is a virus that gets to people when they are bitten by **infected** mosquitoes. Not all mosquitoes are infected. In fact, only a **very, very, small number** of mosquitoes are actually infected.

Can the West Nile Virus make my family or me sick?

Remember, only a very, very, small number of mosquitoes are infected with the virus. So just because a mosquito bit you does not mean you

will get sick. In fact, even if an infected mosquito bit you, the chances of you getting sick are still **very, very small**. Healthy kids don't get the virus very often. But if they do get sick, they don't usually get very sick.



How will I know if I'm sick?

It would feel a lot like the flu. There would be fever, headaches, muscle aches, tiredness, and joint pain, and perhaps a rash.

Does this mean that everyone who feels bad or has the symptoms has the West Nile Virus? **NO!!**

Most people don't get sick at all. Remember, the chances are very, very small. But if you are feeling bad, it is always important to tell your parents or an adult.

What is West Nile Encephalitis?

Encephalitis (it sounds like in-sef-fah-lite-us) is a big word for swelling of the brain, and the West Nile Virus can cause it. Remember, **healthy kids usually don't get very sick**. Encephalitis usually affects people who are old—over 50 years old—or who have been unhealthy in the past.

Can I get West Nile Virus from animals or other people?

No. But remember, it is still important not to play with strange animals or touch dead animals.

How can I keep my family and myself safe?

Start by learning a little about mosquitoes. Did you know that mosquitoes are more active in the early morning and right before the sun goes down? They like being around water. They really like water that is not moving.



Remember, the rest of the summer can still be fun and safe. You just have to follow some simple rules to protect yourself. Always talk to an adult or your parents if you are worried about something or if you have questions about your health. The more information you have, the safer you can be.

For example, if you have an old wagon outside that is full of water, a mosquito might come along and lay her eggs in it. Older mosquitoes like to live in tall grass or weeds.

Other ways to keep safe are:

- Finish playing outside before it begins to get dark. This is when most mosquitoes are out.

- Wear long sleeve shirts and pants when playing outside. (Make sure you don't get too hot. Drink lots of water).

- Don't play near tall grasses or standing water.
- Make sure your toys are not holding water.

For Example: Dump the water out of the old wagon and make sure the plastic swimming pool is empty when nobody is using it.

- Have your parents spray your clothes with insect repellent. (Ask them to use repellent that has DEET in it.) They can contact the Extension office if they need more information.

- Don't use too much of the insect repellent.

ALWAYS follow the directions on the insect repellent.

- Tell your parents or an adult when you have a mosquito bite.

(Parents: This material is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical care. Direct specific questions to your medical provider.)

References

South Dakota Cooperative Extension Website: South Dakota West Nile Virus Fact Sheet. South Dakota Department of Health - Office of Disease Prevention (<http://sdces.sdstate.edu/>).
South Dakota Cooperative Extension Website: Q & A on West Nile Virus. (<http://www.state.ssd.us/doh/WestNile/Q&A.htm>).
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